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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Palestinians, Syria/Iran,
Syria/Senegal, Lebanon, MEPP, Olmert/Bush (11/15)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today (Nov. 15) reported that Vice President Shar'a met separately with Faruq Qaddumi, Chief of the PLO Political Department, and Dr. Mustafa al-Barghuthi, Secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative. Talks focused on the situation in the occupied territories and the results that have been achieved regarding the formation of a national unity government. Al-Shar'a renewed Syria's call to lift the siege on the Palestinian people and to strengthen Palestinian unity. Al-Barghuthi met in Damascus yesterday (Nov. 14) with Khalid Mish'al, Chief of the HAMAS Political Bureau, and other members of the Political Bureau to review the agreement that has been reached among Palestinian factions to form a national unity government.

Papers also reported the remarks of Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al-Abrash's in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki in Tehran on Nov. 14 stressing that Damascus considers consultations and cooperation with Iran a major principle of its foreign policy and confirming Syria's resolve to develop ties with Iran. Mottaki said that developing relations with Syria is logically necessary and that interaction between the countries serves regional policies.

On Lebanese issues, papers reported a statement by Hassan Nassrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah, on Tuesday (11/14) that the party has nothing to do with the current Lebanese government after the resignation of five ministers. Nasrallah made the statement in remarks to seven thousand Lebanese citizens from Beirut's southern suburb whose houses were destroyed during the latest Israeli aggression on Lebanon, promising them that an honest Lebanese government will appear very soon to repair all the damage caused by the Israeli aggression. Papers also featured a statement by Salim al-Hoss, Head of the Lebanese National Unity Platform, confirming that lawyers in Lebanon consider the latest cabinet session, without six resigning ministers, illegal. "We condemn all opinion monopolists and the dangerous situation into which they have led the country," he said, pointing out that this situation threatens Lebanon's national destiny. Al-Hoss clarified that in such a case the government should be reconstituted, to include all Lebanese factions.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Receiving a message from President Asad, Sultan Qabbous Bin Said of Oman: We appreciate Syria's positions and consultations with Arab brothers" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/15)

"Meeting with al-Qaddumi, Chairman of the Political Bureau of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and al-Barghouti, Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative, Vice President Shar'a: Unifying Palestinian ranks guarantees achievement of Palestinian aspirations. Al-Barghouti: The meeting with Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau Meshal was positive and constructive" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/15)

"Speaker of the People's Assembly al-Abrash continues his discussions in Tehran; Iranian Foreign Minister Motakki: Our joint positions are sound... Our enemies are passing through difficult circumstances" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/15)

"Nasrallah, Hizbollah SecGen, calls for formation of a clean government soon. Lebanese President Lahoud to UN Chief Annan: Decisions adopted by the al-Saniora government are not binding on Lebanon" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/15)

"Former Lebanese Prime Ministers discuss today dangers of the governing team's position, after resignation of the Hizbollah and Amal Movement ministers" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/15)

"Spain is to announce a new peace initiative for the Middle East" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/15)

"Palestinian factions agree on distribution of ministerial portfolios. Israel criticizes the Palestinian national unity government prior to its inauguration, rejects a peace conference, and threatens to reoccupy the Gaza Strip" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/15)

"Over one hundred employees kidnapped from the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education. Over 41 Iraqis killed in two American raids against Baghdad and al-Ramadi. Australia joins the group of Washington's allies turning against Bush's policy in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/15)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"In Order to Regain the 'Honest Broker' Status"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/15): "The successive statements that have been made over the past few days on the need to hold dialogue with Syria and embark on solutions to all the issues of the region, especially the unjustifiably stalled peace process, are interesting....

"US Pastor Rick Warren, who yesterday met with President Asad and Foreign Minister Al-Mouallem, said: Washington is wrong not to hold dialogue with Syria, which seeks peace. I call on Americans to visit Syria and meet its beautiful people. I will tell Americans that their idea about Syria does not reflect the truth....

"The question amid reports about American political developments and willingness to revise positions toward the issues of the region after the Congressional elections is: Is there a positive change in the US position, one that corrects the accumulated mistakes that have harmed the United States and its image in the world, or is this just an attempt to throw dust in the eyes and keep the situation in the region on hold for at least two more years?

"Those who heard Condoleezza Rice's statement, justifying the veto against a Security Council draft resolution condemning Israel for the Bait Hanoun massacre, did not sense an intention to change positions. Rice described the draft resolution as emotional and the American veto as a service for peace! This does not give hope that there will be a constructive and objective position toward the issues of the region.

"The facts are clear. The United States does not need anyone to reformulate its convictions if it just looks back a little, when all parties, in the region and beyond, were working for peace and Israel alone was saying no to peace, thwarting even the constructive

American efforts at that time, efforts that were based on the exchange of land for peace in accordance with international resolutions and the terms of reference of the Madrid conference. "Syria, which renewed its constructive position through Minister Al-Mu'allim yesterday when he said in Cairo that Syria is ready for dialogue with the United States to achieve security and stability in the region, seeks a just and comprehensive peace, and extends its hand sincerely, as it has in every position it has adopted, awaiting the reactions of the others, as the ball is now in their court.

"Bush's Preemptive Presents"

Ghazi al-Dada, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (11/15): "Olmert is visiting the United States to assure himself that nothing has changed in the unlimited American support for Israel after the Democrats took control of Congress....
"The Bush administration gave Israel a preemptive present on the eve of the visit when it used its veto against a Security Council draft resolution condemning Israel.... Condoleezza Rice's statements trying to justify the use of the veto were nothing more than hollow words that have no meaning other than following the bloody Israeli path....
"Between the United States and Israel there is more than coordination of positions. There are unified strategic policies and joint plans that do not augur any good for the region."

"What Is Next?"

Bassam Raswan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (11/15): "For a long time we haven't witnessed such a unified, strong Arab decision as the one that materialized in Cairo from Arab Foreign Ministers who adopted a decision to break the siege on Palestinians....
"We hope that the decision will mark the beginning of other Arab

steps to bridge the gaps between the positions of the Arab governments toward many Arab and regional issues that, undoubtedly, highly affect pan-Arab security....
"Arabs can take advantage of the miserable defeat that the Republicans sustained in the US midterm elections.... The American plan in the region is retreating.... We wonder if Arabs will fill the vacuum before others do...."

"The Bitter Harvest"

Isam Dari, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (11/15): "The neoconservatives in the United States are to be blamed for the defeat of the Republican Party in the midterm elections, as they were the ones who devised theories, drew up policies, and launched aggressions....
"The extremist wing in the Republican Party brought defeat upon the party, disgrace upon the nation, and disasters upon the world....
"If Republicans want to win the presidential election in two years, they must do a major job to clear the reputation of the Party, which has sunk very low, and perhaps abandon the neoconservative trend and offer conservatives as scapegoats....
"The Republican Party is paying today the price of neoconservative policies.... What is more important is that the world might witness less extremist and less hostile US policies in the near future."

Corbin